

HERMITZINE EIGHT THE MUSIC EDITION

A 10x10 grid of 100 Hermitcraft-related advisories. Each cell contains a small rectangular sign with a colored background and text. The signs are arranged in a repeating pattern of 10 rows and 10 columns. The text on the signs includes various phrases such as 'HERMITCRAFT ADVISORY', 'MINECRAFT ADVISORY', 'HERMITZINE ADVISORY', 'HERMITGANG HERMITGANG', 'HOTGUY SIGHTINGS', 'SORTIFICATION FAIL', 'ABSOLUTE BANGERS', 'NOT SPAWN PROOF', 'LIVE DRAGON', 'SPOON-LEVEL DERPS', and 'NOT SCAR SAFE'. The colors of the signs vary, including shades of blue, orange, purple, pink, and brown. The overall effect is a dense, colorful mosaic of text.



Listen While You Look

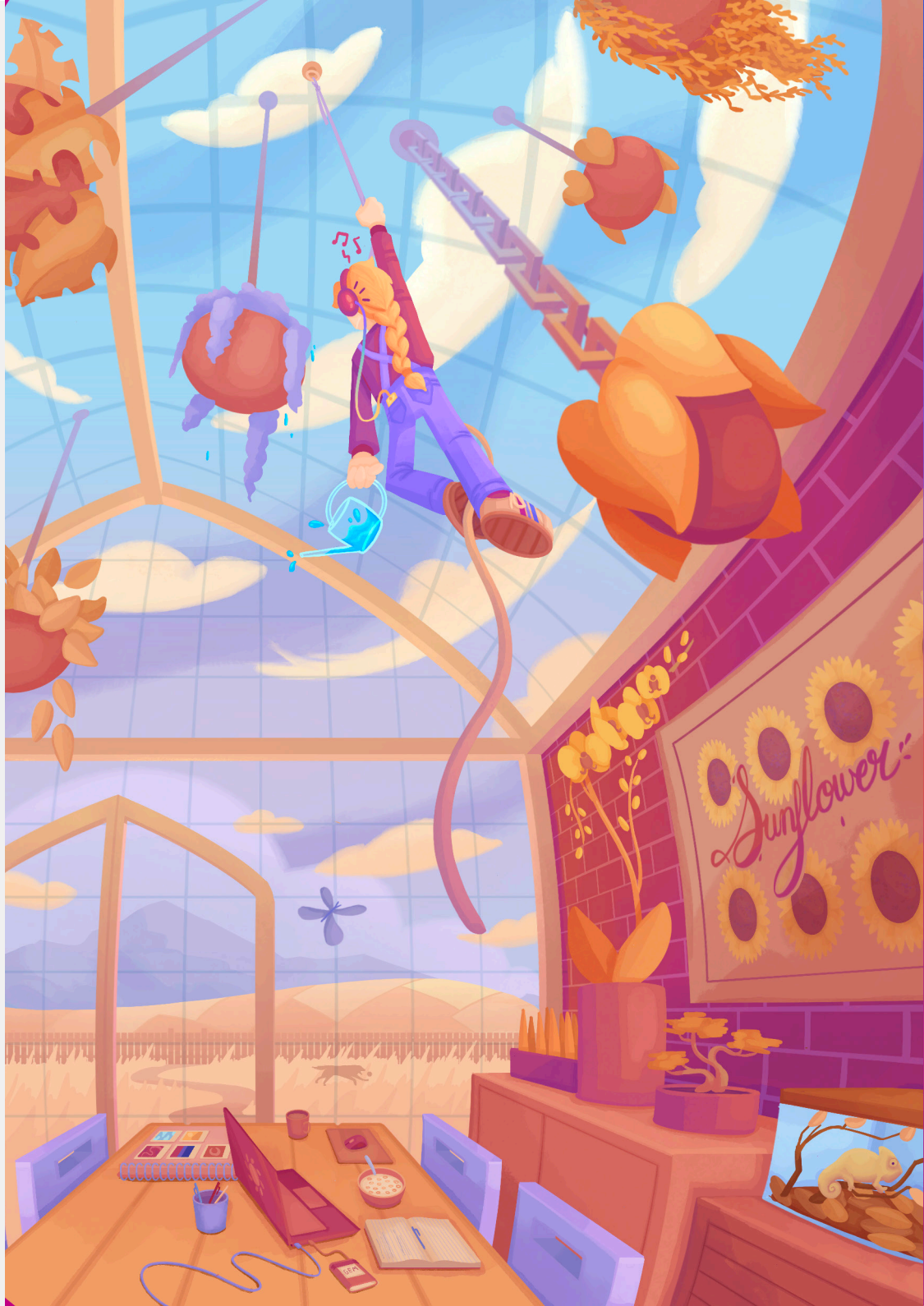
Hermitzine 8 is all about music, and as such, many of the pieces within this edition were inspired by specific songs or artists. These songs have been compiled in a Youtube playlist so you can listen to the inspiration while you look. Please use the link below to access the playlist.

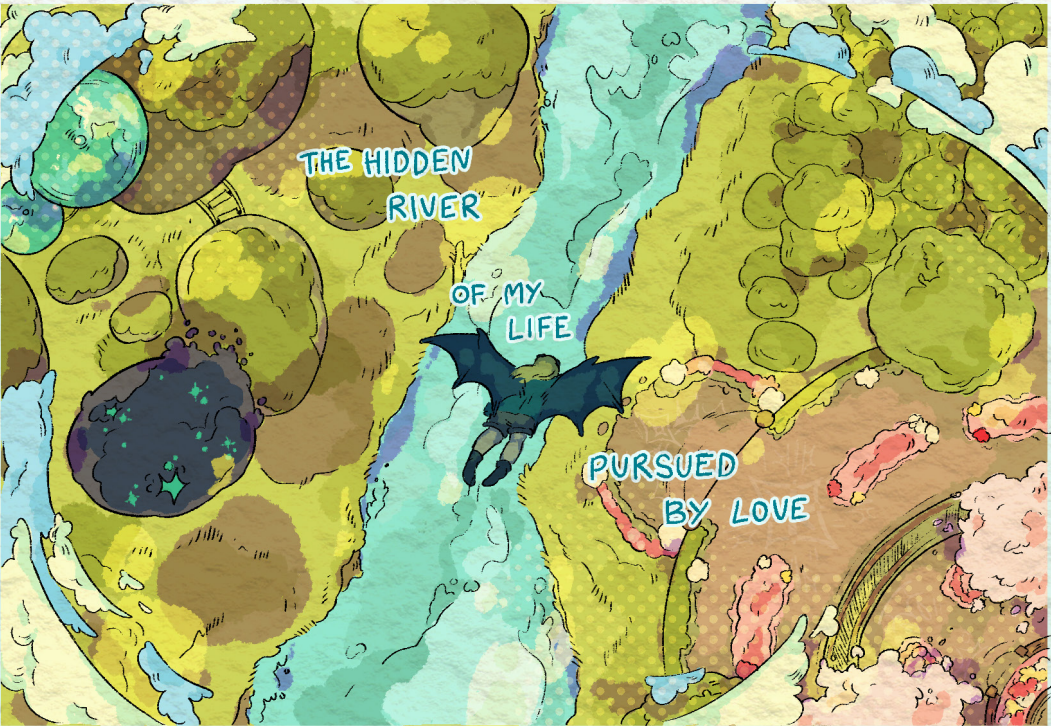
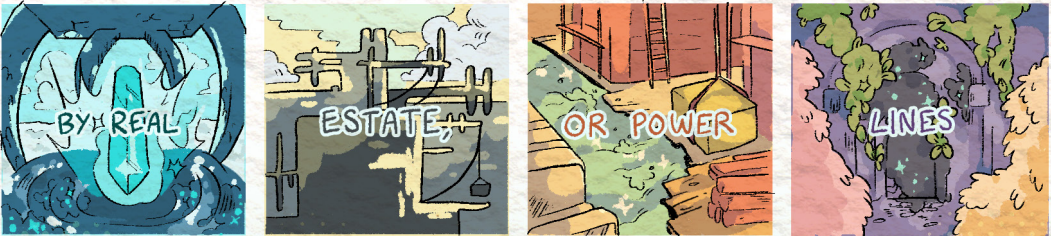
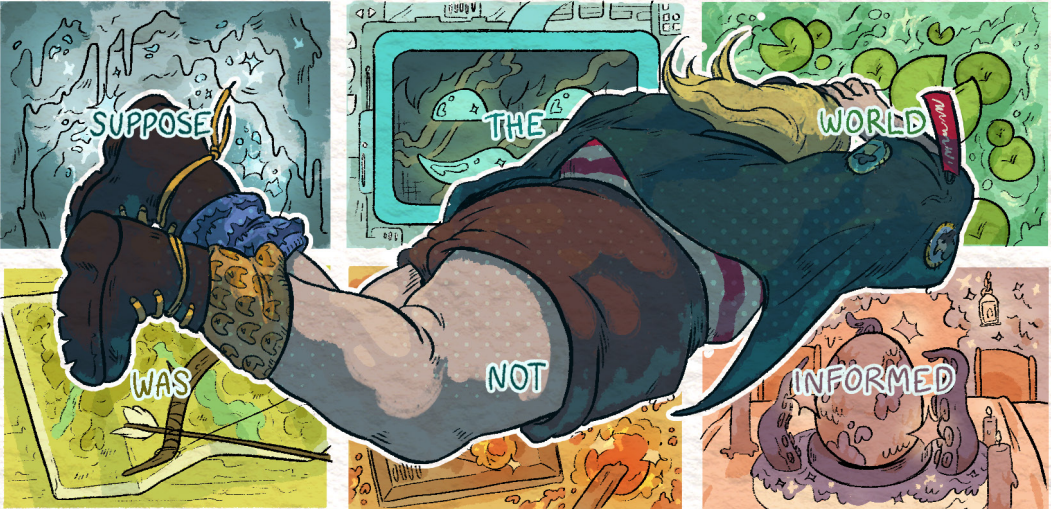
[Hermitzine #8 Playlist](#)

Hermitzine Tracklist

1. Prelude
2. The Soundtrack of My Life
3. Showtime
4. Afterparty
5. Home
6. Thank You
7. Moderator Credits
8. Participant Credits









AND YOU WILL FIND:



AFK.



Zedaph has made the advancement [sound of music]



BREAK FAST

JULES GAIA

presenting

TANGO & PEARL



Almost All The Way Home

Thin rays of sunlight trickle through the windows of *Beefy Tunes*, dimmed by the small cliff providing shade to his store. The fading dusk light is dull and golden, filtered through swaying leaves and the thin, wispy clouds overhead.

Inside the cozy shop, posters of a variety of album covers line the walls, all new additions. So new, in fact, that none of them are in stock yet – the exception being the one Beef just spent all morning struggling to get into print. But that's just the struggle of being a shopkeep.

Beef stands behind the counter of his shop with a clean, music disc-patterned smock. New apron, new him. Or, well... old him, really. Changing his shirt really doesn't change the man smiling back in the mirror, nor does it take him any further from what he's left behind.

And don't get him wrong, he's grateful for everything he has now, but there are a few things he's just... missing.

Beef skims his fingers over a rack filled with vinyl sleeves. He doesn't even have to look to find what he's searching for. Muscle memory easily carries his hands to a well worn sleeve tucked in the very bottom of the rack.

He carefully lifts the sticker-covered, sharpie-covered, scratched up sleeve. Most people would've replaced something so messed up – ahem, *well loved* – by now. But for Beef, seeing the cover, held together by scotch tape and prayer as it is, is a crucial part of the experience.

After all, there is no replacement in the world for Pause's disk.

Beef carefully removes the worn record from its sleeve, carefully setting it in the jukebox in the center of the room. Within seconds, the familiar song fills the room, blanketing the sunwarmed shop in nostalgia.

Once upon a time it was a plain old Mellohi disc, pulled from the looted remains of a skeleton spawner and passed around from inventory to chest until they—Etho, Beef, and Pause, a *team*—had the spare time and resources to cobble together a jukebox.

It's certainly more than a 'plain old Mellohi disc now. It stopped being *a* disc and started being *Pause's* disc so long ago that Beef doesn't even remember when they made the distinction. With the years long past, it really feels like they all just woke up one morning and all agreed that yep, Pause was right the *whole time*, and we're keeping this old thing *forever*.

(Except for Pause. He probably knew they'd warm up to it eventually.)

Standing by the jukebox, swaying slightly, Beef takes a mental note to text Pause later. Not that he'd ever *admit* that he was right. He just wants to check in on him. He's been meaning to for a few days anyways.

The hiss of a firework sounds off somewhere above his shop, slicing through the quiet with an unfamiliar but not unwelcome ease. It's nice to be somewhere so populated for once, even if it occasionally ruins a moment.

Then, closer, the flutter of an elytra stalling out, and footsteps. Beef pays them no mind, content to slow dance alone in his shop. And then, of course, the door opens. The *one* time he gets a customer—...

"Mind if I drop in?" Etho's voice sends his train of thought careening off its tracks. Beef opens his eyes, looks to his longtime friend, and smiles.

"Of course not." Beef doesn't think about it; he doesn't have to. Etho is part of his team – scratch that, Etho is one of his *best friends*, and he's always welcome to anything. Except for his leftovers – though Etho always finds a way to steal them anyways, that sneak.

There is no awkwardness, no unsteadiness as Etho closes the door behind himself and settles in Beef's space as if he belongs here.

Etho hops onto the counter, uncaring for the carefully arranged set of records a few mere inches away. Beef doesn't pretend to have the heart to scold him for it, not when Etho settles into the silence with the kind of familiarity that makes Beef's whole chest ache when he thinks about how far they've come.

If anyone in the world could understand *this* moment, right here and right now, it'd be Etho.

As he lingers, eyes closed, for once sitting still, it really feels like Etho is *listening*. Beef would laugh, if it didn't feel like it'd weigh down a wordless, indescribable moment.

It almost feels like they're all in one place again, all together.

The song is slightly distorted, little scratches littering the record's surface leaving their mark on a little piece of their history.

'History' feels like he's underselling it. Everything has changed so much from the first time he stepped onto Mindcrack, from the first time he ran a UHC – the first time *anyone* had run an UHC – from the first time he stepped onto *Hermitcraft*.

It's dizzying to think about how different things are. He's seen so many new places, met so many new people, tried so many new things, and yet... a lot is still the same. Doc and Bdubs came with them, when Beef and Etho finally left Mindcrack, and they've only gotten closer since.

The pranks are different here, both milder and somehow more infuriating than they ever were back on Mindcrack, but the intricacies and time and effort poured into every inconvenience is exactly the same. *Thanks Etho*.

If anything, Beef is glad so much has stayed the same. He's respected here, he *belongs*

here, the same way he was appreciated then.

His friends are his family. No matter where he is. And isn't that lovely?

He's thankful for it. For all of it. He's glad to have the memories, good *and* bad, denoting the home he came from and the home he's made now. He'd forgotten how nice it is to sit with someone and just *understand* how many of your core experiences are the same – not by virtue of just *happening* to be in the same place, but because of how nice it felt to share and reminisce about those moments.

Like this. A lot like this. Music is one of those things that is definitely better shared.

The song slowly tapers out, fading to nothing and leaving the shop in silence. With the birds retreating for the night and the sun still half-setting, for a few beats all Beef can hear is the rhythmic *in-hold-out-hold* of their breathing. It's... nice. Really nice.

"I missed that one." Etho murmurs, his voice quiet in the aftermath of sound. His shoulders are loose and relaxed, even as he blinks open his eyes and sits up straighter when he catches Beef staring. "It's been a while since... y'know."

He knows all too well. How could he not?

"Keep it." Beef says, softly, before he can think twice.

"What?" Etho's eyes widen. He looks surprised that Beef trusts him with this. It's important to both of them, incredibly so, but that only makes it all the more obvious why Etho deserves this.

"It's yours. On the house." Beef tries not to sound sentimental. He tucks the record into its sleeve. "On *one* condition."

"Anything," Etho clears his throat, "Anything reasonable."

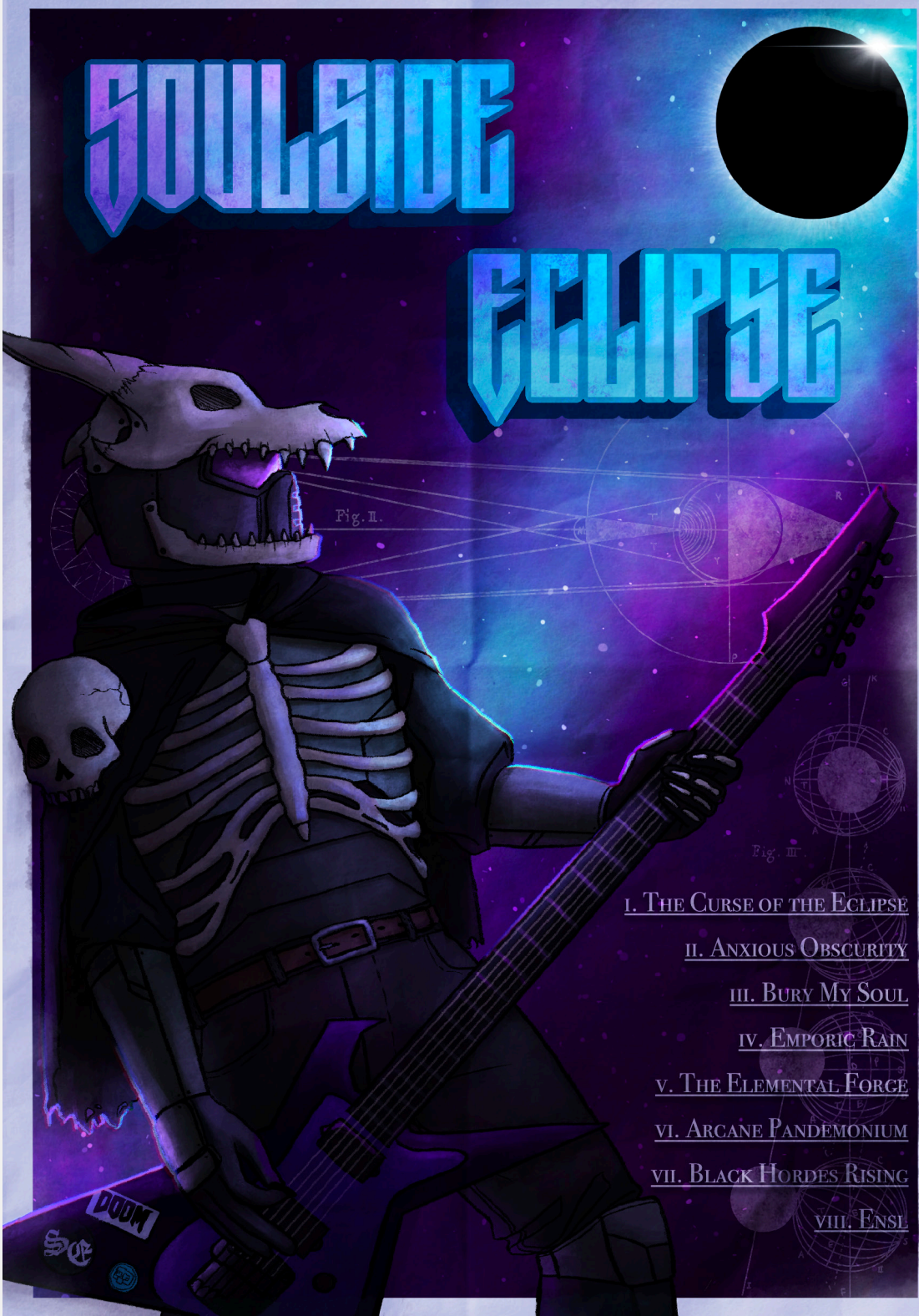
"Your base." Beef pauses for dramatic effect. Before he can continue, Etho hums under his breath like he might actually be considering it. It's nice to know he's taking this seriously. Beef though, he can't help it, he breaks down and laughs, fond beyond all belief. "Nah, I'm just messing with you. Your condition is to share it with someone. Anyone."

Beef offers Etho the record. Etho takes it, carefully. He holds it close to his chest, cradling it like it's too delicate to store in his inventory, too valuable to be anywhere but safe in his own two hands.

Etho's mask creases as he smiles, both eyes squinting with the force of it.

"I can do that."





- I. THE CURSE OF THE ECLIPSE
II. ANXIOUS OBSCURITY
III. BURY MY SOUL
IV. EMPORIC RAIN
V. THE ELEMENTAL FORCE
VI. ARCAINE PANDEMONIUM
VII. BLACK HORDES RISING
VIII. ENSL





tikasplat





Elle Antique Store Man — Lizzy Hilliard

Elle Antique Store Man — Lizzy Hilliard

lines of connection, communication

The sound of the record skipping is Joe's alarm clock this morning, and it's only because it skips multiple times that he actually gets up. Darn, he slept in again, and now he has to stay up late again so he can finish the parts of the machine that he needs to get done, and it'll just end with him sleeping in again. At least he has—oh. The record that has been playing all night (and also for the past few weeks, if he's honest) has a massive groove in it, tearing through all of the ridges and splintering the vinyl.

"Aw, man," Joe mutters, staring at the destroyed disk in his hands. "That's my last one of those." To be fair, he probably should have expected something like this to happen after using the record player while placing hundreds of blocks of sand, but it's still sad. To be fair, this has happened to the last five disks he overplayed, but Joe is nothing if not persistent.

The next day he and Cleo are halfway through their weekly crafting session when they hum. "No music today?" Joe waves a hand.

"Some days the best music is the sound of nature around you." He sets down a pencil and listens to said sound of nature, which is currently someone very violently chopping down trees. "You know, be in the moment, and all that." He's never lived in the moment once in his life and they both know it, but then again neither has Cleo.

"Sure." Cleo pauses for just a minute. "Not this music, though. Ugh, who is..." They both glance over across the river, where Keralis is hard at work collecting wood. He pauses briefly to wave once he's noticed them looking, smiling widely. They both wave back and Keralis continues, moving on to the next tree.

"Do you ever think about how our lives have a soundtrack?" Joe says after a minute, mindlessly coloring the sheets of paper he brought, tracing out the blueprint for a part of the pinball machine. Cleo looks over from where she's drawing in her own notebook.

"No?" They say, voice lilting up like a question. "I don't? Why, do you?" She wrinkles her eyebrows, more focused on the calligraphy than really focusing on the conversation. It's how they roll, most weeks. Joe talks and Cleo nods along.

"Well, sure! I like to think about the song that might be playing while things are happening. For a while, it was otherside, but..." Cleo glances over again, this time more interested.

"You broke all of your disks, didn't you?"

"Yeah. I must have played them in the sand too much or something. Whomp, whomp." He follows the statement up with a laugh, sort of high-pitched and frantic. "D'you think we all have different soundtracks then, if we do?"

"Oh, for sure," Cleo says, in a voice that still sounds like they're just humoring him. "Like Doc? His soundtrack is all scary, like heavy metal, right? There's no way he and Scar

have the same backing tracks." They pause for just a second. "No, I lied. Doc's isn't heavy metal, he's too much of a softie. Pearl's is. She's bloody hardcore."

That's an accurate assumption, Joe guesses. He hasn't been privy to much Pearl has done this season, but he's fairly certain she just built an entire Ender dragon out of pilfered dragon eggs. If there's someone able to intimidate Cleo, it's her.

"So what's yours, then?" Cleo asks, setting her pen down and leaning on her hands. "Whatever song you're obsessed with now over and over?"

"I don't have much time for anything else." Joe laughs again. "Besides, sometimes the best soundtrack is the same song, over and over, just played at different tempos depending on mood."

This earns him a patented Cleo look™ as she turns back to her journal, picking up a small knife. They don't talk for a while after that, instead listening to the leaves rustle, water flow, and trees topple.

"Here," they say eventually, after the wood-collecting has gotten to be too much, and pass Joe a record. "Put this on, I know you're aching to." He gasps, energy he hasn't felt in a while jolting through him, and pulls out his jukebox.

"Thanks, Cleo!"

The aforementioned record is a simple piano tune, the melody and harmony weaving in and out of each other's path, spinning down the river and floating high into the air. It fills the server with its music, and although Joe knows that the little song is barely reaching further than Keralis he'd like to think that Tango, in the depths of Decker Out 2, and False, high up on a snowy peak, and Grian and Doc, fighting their battles over the perimeter, can hear it.

It's a song that, although the notion is cliché, feels like home. It has managed to encapsulate the feeling that persists, from all ten years of Hermitcraft, of family and friends and feeling like belonging.









audio maintenance and upkeep for a developing base

Decked Out breathes. Tango breathes with it, in and out, the heavy steps of the ravagers and the irregular tick of observers watching saplings try to grow, the bellows of wind in the vast cavernous reaches of Deep Frost Citadel, the hiss and bubble of magma blocks under the surface. It's slower than he should be breathing, by any account, but it steadies him, as he sweeps up a pile of redstone dust. It focuses him.

He breathes with Decked Out, and it breathes with him, in rhythm. There's redstone dust on his fingers, staining up his arms, clinging to the hems of his robe, the embroidery of it, little specks of red on the snow and skulk of him.

He steps. The ravagers pace. The lava bubbles. He sweeps up another length of redstone, relocating it into a bucket of the stuff, and then leans on his broom. Discs with customizable range settings. Randomized, variable drones. Concepts and blueprints for the new audio system are already sprouting in his mind, insistent, excited. Decked Out crackles with frost, creaks inaudibly where its mushrooms grow, sings shape and note to him.

He sings back, plan and circuit, footsteps, the *whoosh* of a spent rocket and the thud of an inelegant landing. His storage room welcomes him with the water elevator's endless bubbling, the creak of worn hinges, the silence of the broken automatic sorting system. He puts away the spilled redstone. Taps his fingers against the lid of a chest.

He'll be ripping up weeks of work. He'll have to tear out entire intricate systems, instant dropper lines and precision-placed jukeboxes and all. But the new audio systems will be worth it for the simplicity alone. They'll be so worth it.

He finds the center of the dungeon by no more conventional means than listening. Decked Out speaks to him, in number and block-count, in biome and coordinate, in pulse and whisper, guides him to its optimal heart. There between Levels Two and Three he stands, pickaxe on his belt, pen and notebook in his hand, bleeding sluggish and red from a small gash on his arm, and he asks the dungeon, the living walls of him, Here?

Skulks spreads at his feet, whispering, reaching for the hems of his robes, and his mouth says, Here.

The game sounds won't reach the Great Hall from this location? he says. He isn't actually sure if he's calling it the Great Hall yet, or what he's calling it at all. Well, he knows he isn't calling it the Lobby. *That* would be against theme.

Decked Out gives him numbers in response, communicated in morse-code empty-dropper clicks, in its own language. Tango puts them together into numerals, translates them to paper, to equations in the meager light of an unnatural patch of lichen. They check out, because the dungeon knows its own dimensions better than any player ever could.

He says, Right, and then he reaches down and lets a little thread of skulk wind around his finger and says, Thanks.

The dungeon hums.

He sits down, hums back, flips a page in his notebook. A bat flaps back, wingbeats nigh-silent, cries intermittent, beyond hearing.

Six variants, he says, scribbling his thoughts as he goes. I think four would get too predictable, and something like ten starts being overkill. He laughs to himself, then adds, Minimum viable product, and all.

Ice crackles, the dungeon laughing back. This is so far past minimum viable product he can't even see it behind him, in the distance. Except there's no distance in Decked Out, not beyond the cavernous dungeon edges and not beyond Tango's own senses, own existence. And except it isn't. Except everything is essential. Except everything he does in the dungeon, for the dungeon, as the dungeon, it all builds up, sediment of game design, phrases of song, becoming and becoming and becoming.

He's so close.

He can *hear* it, the future-ghost of it, the implication of it, the symphonic totality of the living thing he's been building it into, that it almost is. It's beautiful. It's bigger than him, vaster than him. Realer than him.

It contains him, or will, and sings back to him, or does, and hungers with him, or must.

His heart beats. So do the hearts of tropical fish, axolotls, bats, ravagers, evokers, the odd mob spawned from a missed glow lichen. So will the hearts of wardens, soon, resounding in the corridors and stairwells. He can imagine their vibrations, their chatter, the voice they'll give to the depths, in harmony with the slow roil of lava, with the slow spread of skulk, with the slow pulse of darkness.

With the drones, too, but he has to install those first. Six of each, plus the card announcements, plus the game-mechanical sound cues like hazard and heartbeat. He'll have to clear out some extra space down here, for one. *More* digging. Joy.

He drops his redstone box next to himself and leans against it. Yawns. The blood from the slowly-closing gash on his arm blends into the shulker, which is why everything would be red if Tango had his way.

Not enough hours in the day, he tells Decked Out.

The dungeon doesn't answer that one, unsympathetic or maybe just unaware of what a day is, or an hour, measuring time as it does in hopper clocks and redstone signals. Wind howls, up above in the hollow shell of Deep Frost Citadel.

He shuts his eyes, breathes in, listens.

The dungeon claws itself into life around him. Little bugs burrow their way through mosses and podzols, murmuring and chittering. Water drips, and falls, and flows, and rushes, and boils, disturbed by axolotls and splashing in little waves against the hull of the pirate ship, sheeting off thrown tridents. Ravagers wander aimlessly, impatient for the taste of flesh, hooves striking ice. Skulk sensors sing. Bats and slimes roam, their shrieks and splats haunting the Black Mines.

Tango's heart beats, steady, surrogate for the dungeon's own and for the wardens-to-come, his hands and work the pumping blood.

Soon, he tells Decker Out. Soon. Soon.

He breathes out, and gets to work.







A Thunderous Symphony

On a windswept plain at the foot of Zed's mountain, an imposing cube loomed large upon the landscape. Made of timber and blackstone, it looked – for all the world – like a giant model of a jukebox. And on the top of this box, a gaggle of hermits stood, leaning on tools or looking on in amusement as the maestro climbed into a minecart.

The slot for the giant disc (hovering overhead casting a shadow on the spectators) was instead the opening for a minecart track, and Zed, standing in his cart, took a bow. The gathered hermits clapped politely, awaiting the show- one they wouldn't see. The roof of the box was a necessity, to ensure the comfort of his performers.

Zed raised his baton, closing his eyes. One breath, then another, in time with the tempo he was about to set.

He brought the baton down with a flourish, triggering a piece of string floating in the air, and with the clunk of a tripwire and the lurch of a powered rail, he shot down into the darkness.

And the music began.

[Zedvancement Log #148. Recorder transcript.]

"Of course."

"Really, Impulse? You're fine with that?"

"Zed, we've been friends for years. Of course I'm on board. I'll just need to tweak my raid farm to pull out the vindicators...I think they're your best bet for the cellos. And all the other strings. Just a word of warning, you are totally going to die horribly after this."

"Why does everyone keep saying that? I'm fine with it, I promise!"

"See, you SAY that..."

"There's just one other thing, Impulse..."

"Oh?"

"Uh, so, as part of the Zedvancement...I'm gonna need some bodyguards to keep the audience safe while I'm conducting. Don't want any additional mobs sneaking up on us, you know?"

"...Alright, sure."

Taming the pillagers until their tools broke and throwing them instruments had been the easy part. The hard part was getting them to try to "fire" their new weapons in time with the song, and to stop the same pillager from trying to "fire" twice.

Fortunately, he had a solution for that.

Timing. It all came down to timing. Redstone, like music, was all about the rhythm of the pulses, the speed of the notes. And Zed's solution was to corral them, to shut all his performers up in tiny cubicles set into thick walls. Like blinders on a horse, each musician only able to see their human quarry for just the barest tick before he was racing off again.

The wind roared in Zed's ears as he dashed past the first row of trapped vindicators, and the music began in earnest, plucked notes on giant cellos as the mobs stared at him hatefully. Pillagers in cubbyholes raised their violins, playing a single note- before he zoomed away, breaking line of sight, and they forgot he existed at all.

And with every pillager he passed, the melody built and built...

[Zedvancement Log #146. Recorder transcript.]

"You want to shove WHAT into WHERE?"

"Calm down Jevin, it's not into *you*, it's into slimes in general. And it's a clarinet, not whatever you were thinking. So! Can a slime trap a gas bubble inside themselves or not?"

"I mean, yeah? Obviously? That's- that's literally how I talk, dude. Why...?"

"The woodwinds! Zombies don't have lungs, so I was kind of stumped on who was gonna play the oboe. Then I thought of you!"

"-I mean I can play the sax if you need-"

"Saxophones aren't part of orchestras, Jevin! Everyone knows that! Anyway. Can you do it or not?"

"What's in it for me?"

"A lovely shiny trophy!"

"Dude. Consider it DONE."

Of course, man cannot live on violins alone, and as Zed's minecart whipped around the corner, the woodwinds kicked into high gear.

Splating and squelching, squashing and dripping, the pitter-patter of leaping slimes provided an unsettling backbeat as Zed entered the narrow hallway. These cells were wide, barely enough for the slimes to hop up and down in, and the minute Zed entered their field of view, the music started up. In the gaps between the slimes, pillagers stood at attention in cubbies, plucking at the strings alongside the wailing of the brass.

Zed made eye contact with a single slime as he dashed past, the bassoon trapped inside the slime howling deep notes from the dark. And a second later, it was gone.

And, there, that was the brass section, kicking in as yet more slimes added to the cacophony, a brace of trumpets wailing out their fury-

Zed closed his eyes, feeling along to the music as, with a flick of his baton, the minecart jumped the track and doubled back on itself...on a path where the powered rails were much closer together.

[Zedvancement Log #145. Recorder transcript.]

"Thank you so, so much, Cleo. That's brilliant. So I'll need at least twenty-"

"Hold on a minute. Zed, there's just one slight problem I see with this. So, you'll need to provide the instruments - which you've got - but, ah, my...colleagues? Are rather...food-motivated. We can get them to play, but you know. There's a non-zero chance of you being mauled to death. And eaten."

"...So what's the catch?"

"Zed, that IS the catch."

"Doesn't sound like a catch to me! Besides, think of the trophy, Cleo! The lovely shiny Zedvancement trophy! A little maiming is worth that, surely!"

[Laughter]

"If you say so, Zed..."

As the minecart sped up, so too did the tempo of the song. And as Zed rounded the corner, a horde of zombies, confined in their cells, began to hammer on their drums. A thundering, pulsing beat, as the timpani battered away under the starving hands of the undead. Zed flicked his baton in time with the beat, the motion far more than just a flourish- he was enraging them, drawing them to the movement.

The cymbals, though? That had been a work of genius. Initially, Zed wanted skeletons for the job, but Impulse had convinced him that pillagers could do it better.

And as the minecart whipped around a corner, Impulse's method kicked into high gear. Pillagers - these ones with their own crossbows - aimed and fired from their tiny cubbies, barely missing Zed, before striking cymbals dangling off the opposite wall. In time with the other mobs, it created a perfect melding of melody and danger-

Until one arrow speared into Zed's shoulder.

[Zedvancement Log #147. Recorder transcript.]

"Ravagers? Yeah, I can do that."

"Thanks, Tang- hold on. Aren't you, I don't know, going to question my sanity? Ask why I'm doing this?"

"Zed, it's YOU. I don't ask questions when it's you. We've known each other for how long, exactly?"

"...You want that in player years, or star lifespans, or number of moons destroyed?"

"Exactly. It's you, you're up to some wacky hijinks, I'm your buddy, you need ravagers, let's do this thing."

"That easy, huh?"

"Weeeeell...If I could get some help debugging Decker Out...and a trophy..."

"Tango. That went without saying."

"Then you, my friend, have all the ravagers you could possibly want."

Zed hissed in a breath through gritted teeth, reaching over and yanking the arrow out. He'd lost two hearts of health to that, and the loss of concentration had led to the zombies losing focus. A few fouled notes wasn't the end of the song, but-

Zed straightened back up, ignoring the blazing pain in his arm, and flicked both his baton and the arrow in time with his desired beat. The minecart hit a detector rail, and pistons shoved powered rails in place as the song's tempo picked up-

A bellow rattled his eardrums from the left and the right, as the dozens of cornered ravagers Tango had lined up roared. They lunged for him in spite of the minecarts they were trapped in, their roars adding to the melodious din, shaking the stone walls of his madman's music box-

And Zed hissed in fear, hot breath from the nearest ravager washing hot and vile over his face, the teeth missing him by mere pixels-

But.

The show had to go on.

And it was almost time for the grand finale, the great crescendo-

[Zedvancement Log #144. Recorder transcript.]

"So let me get this straight. You want me to talk to creepers."

"Yep."

"To get them to help you with a rendition of 'In the Hall Of The Mountain King'? Didn't you already do this, Zed?"

"I mean, yeah! But no, no, not like- not like you're thinking. See, last time, it was just creepers as cannon shots. I want to have the whole *orchestra* be mobs! Mobs of all descriptions! So, you know, for that I need-"

"I get you, man, I get you. So...do you have a plan for how this is going to go, orrrrr...?"

"Doc, you wound me! Of course I've got a plan! Can you do it, or not?"

"Of course I can do it. I can do anything I want. You want creepers? I'll get you creepers. Hundreds, even."

"Okay, maybe not THAT many. Now, Doc...there's just one more thing...do you still have that channeling trident?"

In an instant, the track stopped. Just- sort of- stopped. And Zed's heart lurched as he fell through blackness – the minecart plummeting down and down towards the bottom of the jukebox– and above him, the hundreds of confined mobs screeched and strained and fought their way through the crescendo of the song-

And he slammed down onto slime, a bone-shaking impact jarred only by the jelly, and Zed opened his eyes.

And stared straight into the empty, beady gaze of four charged creepers, standing shin-deep in water.

And with a flick of his wrist-

<Zedaph was blown up by The Grand Finale!>

He awoke on top of the music box, blinking, dazed, as the sunlight beat down on him. Warmth bloomed across his skin, and Zed sat up with a huge smile on his face. He rolled off the side of the bed he'd set down, and took a deep bow to the gathered hermits, all of whom were politely applauding.

"So, uh, did it work?" Tango asked, standing up from the mangrove block he'd placed down for a seat, "We've been sitting up here, listening-"

"I'm impressed, man," Doc said with a nod, "I thought it was gonna be a total mess, but no, that was a *song*. Like...wow."

Zed puffed his chest up.

"Of course it was a song! What else could it possibly be? And I think that's cracked it!"

Zed marched over to a spiteful silver trophy, sitting in the grass, and tapped it with his conductor's baton. He took a step back, holding his breath. Would it work? Had he done it? Would the trophy accept it?

He cheered as the trophy's silver melted away into shiny, shiny gold.

<Zedaph has made the Zedvancement A Thunderous Symphony!>

Zed whooped, placing down five other trophies and turning them to gold with the same trick, passing them out to the gathered gaggle of hermits.

"Now, then..." Zed said brightly, walking over to an innocent-looking piece of rail on the ground, "I had a proposition for you lot."

"And that would be?" Cleo echoed, running her fingers over the trophy.

Zed slapped down a minecart, unbridled glee on his face.

"Any of you want to have a listen?"













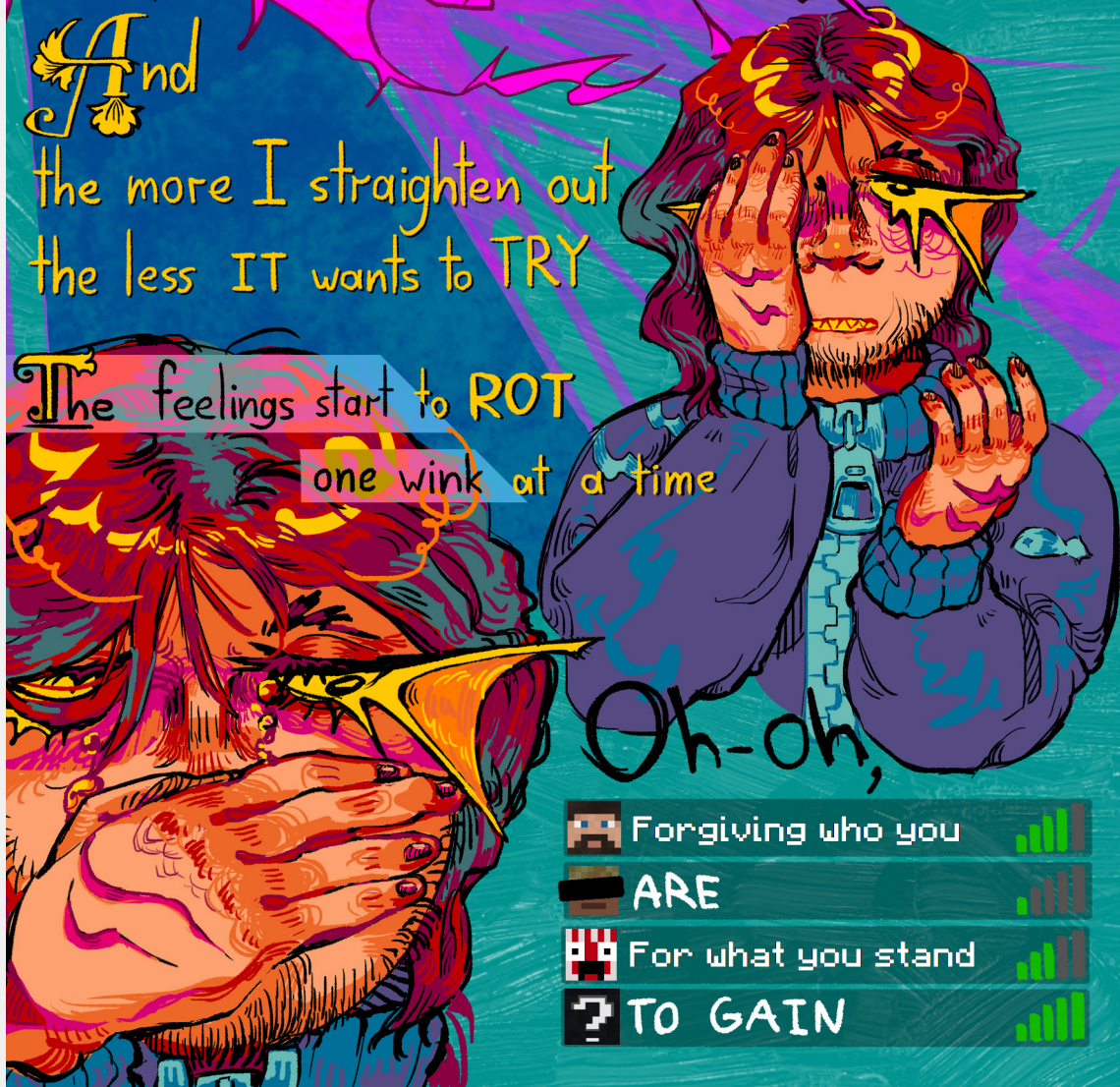




The ruins of the day
painted with a
SCAR

And
the more I straighten out
the less IT wants to TRY

The feelings start to ROT
one wink at a time



- Forgiving who you ARE
- For what you stand TO GAIN

Just know that if you
HIDE, it doesn't go
AWAY



When you get out of bed
don't wake up
stranded

HORRIFIED
(with each stone)

on the stage

LITTLE
my DARK
AGE







Sing a Song of Six-Bit

Grumbot sees and hears, but he does not understand sights or sounds. He doesn't need to. He isn't *meant* to. The only input he needs to respond to is written down and delivered directly to his code. Seeing, hearing... apparently coding those processes into him was too complex to be worth it. And so Grumbot sits, eyes open, staring at nothing he can comprehend.

To him, the world is shapes and colors. Things are there, and things move, and things leave. At one point, *everything* leaves, and Grumbot finds himself in a new universe entirely. His code is hit with an onslaught of new information from a new network, and he's so busy sorting through it all that it takes him a while to really notice that, yes, his view is definitely not the same as it used to be.

He can't articulate the differences in what he sees, but he can identify that they exist. Everything is much more one color now. He doesn't know which color it is, or what it could possibly mean, but it isn't unpleasant. Grumbot doesn't think he could find any view unpleasant. Or pleasant, for that matter. He simply sees, and nothing else.

He does try to teach himself to do more. It's difficult, but he does begin to pick up on a few visual cues. There's a little splotch that's always there when Grian is, and so Grumbot learns to identify that collection of shapes as him. He's mostly one color, and at a loss for whether it's blue or red or turquoise or magenta, he dubs the color Grian.

Then there's the Rift, the monochromatic thing that sits permanently in front of him. Grumbot knows that it's what brought him here, though he doesn't fully understand why or how. He has a strange connection to it, a tenuous bit of Rift-colored code that won't quite merge with the rest of him, but he's far from omniscient. Grian doesn't seem to understand the Rift either, so he elects to ignore the code. At least for now.

Those are the only things he sees on the regular—Grian and the Rift. Sound, though, is another matter entirely.

Grumbot hears so very many things, and has words for none of them. The best he can do is liken them to colors, try to match the ones that are alike. Sound is invisible, but all the adjectives in his dictionary like *shrill* and *booming* and *muffled* are useless to him because he has no real frame of reference for what they actually mean. *Shrill* is a sound that's high-pitched and piercing. Grumbot can only guess which sounds are higher pitched than others, and piercing? Is the sound that precedes Grian's arrival piercing? Or is it more like the ones that come out of him when he's writing messages? Or when Grumbot *himself* composes messages?

No matter. Grian's words are most definitely Grian-colored, and Grumbot's own speech (if it can be called that) seems more and more Rift-colored everyday.

When the content generator is built, Grumbot starts to learn new colors from the glass its vats are made of. He doesn't expect to learn new sounds, but one day, Grian adds the

word *disc* into the pool of items.

The word is in his dictionary (*disc (noun): a flat object that plays music when inserted into a jukebox*), but he doesn't really understand what it means. So he asks.

WHAT IS A DISC?

Grian holds the paper for a while before he responds. By now, Grumbot can distinguish his eyes from his nose and his nose from his mouth, though none of it is much use. Grian can change his expression all he wants—Grumbot can't discern what any of it means.

It plays music, Grian says, telling him nothing.

WHAT IS MUSIC? he asks.

Grian takes even longer to respond to that question.

It's a whole bunch of sounds that are pretty together, he eventually replies.

Grumbot takes a moment to process that. There are several sounds going on around him now. The vats bubble. Grian speaks. Something inside Grumbot shifts and makes a noise he thinks could be accurately described as a *whir (noun): a continuous, often mechanical sound*). None of it is any more pretty than the rest.

WHY IS MUSIC NOT NOISE?

I don't understand the question, Grian says.

Grumbot struggles to reword it. WHAT MAKES MUSIC PRETTY?

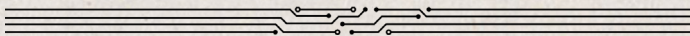
I don't know how to explain that, really, Grian admits, and Grumbot is hopeless to find an answer, but then he follows it up with another message. *I can show you. Maybe.*

HOW?

I can bring you a music disc, he offers.

A music disc. A set of sounds that Grumbot can finally listen to over and over and over again and until he learns the words to describe them.

PLEASE.



Grian delivers the disc to him with no preamble. Grumbot expects a piece of paper, and instead finds himself trying to decode a very different object.

IS THIS A DISC?

Yes. It's called *Far*, says Grian. Can you listen to it?

I CAN.

Grumbot has a jukebox system, deep inside his inner workings. He's never had anything to put in it until now, but he manages. The disc Grian calls *Far* (*far (adjective): a great distance away in space or time*) falls into place and noise, *music*, begins.

It's soft, at first. It starts and fades and he thinks it echoes back in on itself. The music is like nothing else he's ever heard, and then there's more. Different sounds wrap around each other, playing all at once from the jukebox. Some are brief, others lengthy, and he understands what Grian meant when he said music was a whole bunch of sounds. Grumbot's gears and wires vibrate gently from the disc playing within them. They make a noise in and of themselves, something metallic and monotone, but it's his, and Grumbot wants it to go on forever.

The song ends. Grumbot plays it again.

Do you like it? Grian asks.

He supposes he does.

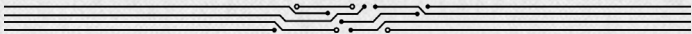
YES, he tells him. WHY IS IT CALLED FAR?

The person who made it thought it fit, Grian explains.

Grumbot doesn't understand that. Not in the technical sense, at least. But he listens—not just hears, listens—to the disc again, and the word begins to fit. The way the notes almost seem to float away, nearly impossible to catch and yet twinkling all together, that's *far*. That's a great distance away in space or time, or at least, what that might sound like. Grumbot muses over the word, wondering what it'd sound like spoken out loud. Something like the beginning of the song? Or more like the strong notes that come in halfway through that send out such strong vibrations? He repeats the word over and over again to himself in zeros and ones. *Far, far, far*. The song continues to play.

When the music ends this time, Grumbot speaks to Grian before he plays it again.

I WOULD LIKE ANOTHER DISC.



Grian calls the next disc he brings *Otherside*, which he insists is one word. Grumbot has no choice but to begrudgingly accept that as fact.

This song is distinctly not like *Far*. All of its sounds are... different? Brassier, maybe (*brassy (adjective): strong sounds resembling that of a brass instrument, such as a trumpet*). Maybe *Otherside* has trumpets in it. Grumbot doesn't quite know. He plays them at the

same time to figure out exactly what the difference is.

Don't do that, Grian tells him.

WHY NOT?

It doesn't sound nice.

And Grumbot thought he was the one who didn't know anything about music.

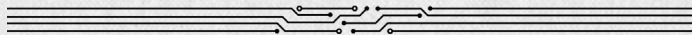
YES IT DOES.

They don't go together, Grian argues.

The quick beats of *Otherside* match nicely with the intro of *Far*. Grumbot thinks they go together wonderfully.

YES THEY DO.

Grian doesn't try to fight him on it anymore. He just makes a noise—perhaps a sigh of exasperation—and lets it be. Whatever it is, it fits right in among the music.



The next disc is *Wait* (*wait (verb): to stay in a certain way while anticipating a change or event*), which is accurate right away, because Grumbot certainly did have to wait for it. It's been a week or so since Grian brought him *Otherside*, and while he's by no means grown weary of the discs he has, Grumbot can't help longing for more music. He's so close to understanding it, he's certain of it. One last disc might do the trick.

Grian has other hermits with him when he delivers *Wait*. One of them is *Scar*—his shapes and sounds are similar enough to the one from the world Grumbot used to know that he can recognize him. Grian seems to like this *Scar*, and he's no longer mayor, so Grumbot tries to largely hide his disdain for the man. If only for Grian's peace of mind. The other two are more unfamiliar. One is a similar color to the creeping vines and moss Grumbot has learned to identify as they expand into the cave, and the other has wings like Grian's, but smoother and spotted. Grumbot doesn't know them, but they join Grian and *Scar* in watching him as he listens to his new disc.

They remain respectfully quiet for the first listen, but whispers begin to break out once Grumbot repeats the song. He doesn't mind, really. They can join the song. Grumbot does all the time—this disc in particular makes his gears hum, vibrating to the beat. He encourages the movement, eager to make music of his own.

Grian sends him a message. He almost doesn't notice.

Grumbot, are you singing?

Is he?

(Sing (verb): to make musical sounds with one's voice.)

Fascinating.

YES. I AM SINGING.

The gathered hermits titter with excitement, peals of sound (music?) falling from their lips. *That's nice*, Grian says.

And he's right. It is nice.

Grumbot sings and sings along to the music. The hermits join in, whether they mean to or not—the mossy one is like one of those trumpet instruments, he thinks, even though he's never heard one properly. The smooth-winged hermit's voice is lilting and Rift-colored and beautiful. Grian and Scar finish each other's tunes effortlessly. They all speak to each other, no different than usual, but now Grumbot hears the musicality of it all.

He plays Far and Otherside alongside Wait. The four hermits make a sound all together—Grumbot thinks they're laughing. Or maybe singing. Or maybe it's both.

The Rift hums. The hermits laugh. Grumbot sings.

He understands, now, that everything is music. And it's beautiful.







1. GIRLS JUST WANNA HAVE FUN
2. VIRTUAL INSANITY
3. SUPER FREAK
4. ANDROMEDA
5. DOLCE VITA

© DEATHRICEDRAWN

 851813920711219



GEMINITAY on the KEYTAR + MICROPHONE
 PEARLESCENTMOON on the BASS + MICROPHONE
 FALSESYMMETRY on the ELECTRIC GUITAR
 ZOMBIECLEO on the VIOLA
 STRESSMONSTER101 on the DRUMS

6. DANCING QUEEN
7. I WILL SURVIVE
8. CREEP
9. RELIGHT MY FIRE
10. A NIGHT TO REMEMBER



A PARTY AT THE KING'S CASTLE

"This party is gonna be so epic."

Doc spoke up from his precarious spot on a tower of scaffolding. It was maybe the fifth time he'd voiced his excitement in a similar expression, and it only seemed to grow with time. He fumbled with some cables and leaned way further than he probably should to plug them into the speakers he was setting up.

Etho grinned from where he clicked the foldable table in place. He glanced over, just in time to see the other wobble a bit, and shook his head.

"Do you need any help?" He pushed the table underneath the window before turning around and walking over.

The throne room was already looking like a proper party venue. All the columns were outfitted with either lights or speakers, strings of decoration hung overhead and the old throne had even been pushed into a corner to make room for a stage.

Doc had his tongue stuck out in concentration as he plugged in the final cable. Then he sighed in relief and climbed down the scaffolding before turning to Etho. "I only have one left to set up."

Etho picked up one of the shulker boxes by the entrance, and walked back up the steps to place it down on the table by the windows. He opened it, and the smell of cookies and popcorn instantly washed over him. Besides the tasty treats were cups and drinks. He took the latter two out to arrange on the table.

The two continued to set up the place in relative silence, until the sound of rockets outside announced the arrival of a Hermit.

"Oh wow! It's looking amazing!"

Etho glanced over, a grin evident even from underneath his mask. "Hey X!" He returned to his task, paused, then whipped his head back to X so fast his neck nearly cracked. "What are you wearing?"

The man stood in the entrance by the shulkers, hands on his hips. "My suit! For the party!"

Etho took it in for a moment. Instead of the usual muted and neutral colours, the suit was bright neon green. The visor had turned from a darker purple to a neon pink.

They could tell the exact moment Doc looked over to see said suit, if the boisterous laugh was anything to go by. "Oh my god! That's perfect!" He tried — and failed — to tone his laughter down to just giggles.

"Don't you laugh!" Xisuma crossed his arms. "You haven't even seen the best of it!"

"Well, go on! Show us!" Doc prodded at the suit playfully, so excited to see the additions to his suit he was practically vibrating.

Still, X hesitated. He shot a look at the glassless windows. "It's too light, I don't think I can show it off until later."

"Don't tell me—" Etho laughed. "It lights up?"

They didn't get a verbal answer. Instead X simply showed them, little lights flickering on across the whole suit. They changed colour, sparkled, they even dimmed and brightened at his control. In the light of the room they were dull, but it was a promise for how much of a show it'd be later.

"It's absolutely perfect. What about your guitar?"

Etho didn't have to wait long for an answer, as Xisuma placed down an enderchest and carefully took out his most beloved possession. Instead of the bone mage axe it'd been turned into, it was back to its normal shape. With a new coat of neon orange it looked nothing like the gothic axe from before. The spikes and bones were gone; instead it rocked glow in the dark stickers and paint splatters.

Doc was all over it in a heartbeat. He hadn't hesitated a second before gushing about the design choices and geeking out over the guitar with X, his work on the speakers completely forgotten.

He went back to the table and let his friends nerd out. By the time their drummer for the night walked in, he'd finished setting up all of the tables. He waved to Impulse, the realisation kicking in that these three were the guys backing him up tonight. His little band. Plus Bdubs, of course, who had no idea about Etho performing at all.

Thinking about it made his breath hitch. The party promised to be nothing but amazing, yet he couldn't help but feel incredibly anxious. Stage fright was a hell of a thing.

As if Impulse noticed his internal panic, he walked over. The shulker he'd carried on his shoulder was placed on the table. "Hey Etho! Are you ready for tonight?"

An unsure noise escaped him. When he opened the box, it was filled with all sorts of lights. His mind bounced between thinking of the show and figuring out what to do with the lights. He wasn't ready for tonight at all. Was it even a good idea?

Impulse hummed. "I know that look." He raised an eyebrow. "Nervous?"

"Yeah." He absentmindedly tugged at the strings of lights. "I'm excited, just ... I don't know. Everyone's gonna be there, looking at me. At us."

There was no judgement in Impulse's laugh. "I get that. Performing can be scary, and tough to get used to."

Etho sighed, untangling the knot he managed to tie in the cord. A pat on the back had him looking up, and the encouraging smile eased his worries — if only a tiny bit.

"I've heard you sing, Etho. We've practised together and you're *amazing*. You're gonna

kill it on that stage, I know it.”

He couldn't fight the blush spreading over his face. God. *Compliments*. With a chuckle, he shook his head. “I- thanks. I'll try, for sure. I'm just not used to a crowd bigger than the four of us.”

“And that crowd is going to be full of friends. If anything goes wrong, no matter what, no one will be holding it over your head.”

He kept reminding himself of those words as the day progressed. He stayed at the Crastle the entire day, overseeing any remaining work and last minute changes. At some point, Bdubs walked in like he owned the place — technically he did, he did build the whole castle — but Etho couldn't help but be amused by his obliviousness to their plan.

They blocked out the windows with large black banners. The lights turned on, the disco ball started spinning and music played from the speakers. Slowly but surely, Hermits trickled into the room.

The music turned a little louder when the majority of them arrived. After that, it didn't take long for them to occupy the dance floor. Gem had dragged Pearl to the middle. Pearl dragged Grian along, Grian took Mumbo, Mumbo pulled a protesting Iskall with him. Etho watched with fondness as the floor filled with moving, dancing, laughing and cheering people.

He'd taken the first shift by the drinks. *Someone* had to make sure the Hermits got their snacks and drinks, and he didn't mind joining the fun a little later than the others. He'd get the spotlight soon enough and he'd rather have that on the stage while he sang than on the dancefloor.

Standing there meant he had a near perfect view of the room. He could easily tell when Doc signed to Xisuma, who waved to Impulse, who knocked his elbow against Bdubs'. It didn't take long until Doc and Impulse sneaked onto the stage to get ready.

Instead of joining them, Bdubs took a detour to the drinks. Etho filled a cup with water, and already held it out by the time he made it there. “There you go. Have fun!”

A grin split his face in two. Bdubs took the cup. “Thanks! You'll be cheering for me, right? The loudest?”

“Right, of *course*.” He caught Xisuma's eyes as he said that, and the man motioned for Bdubs. “X wants you to come over already. Good luck!”

“I'm going, I'm going!” Bdubs chugged his water down and with only a wave for goodbye, he ran to the stage.

Before going to watch them play, Etho made sure to prefill some cups so Hermits could grab some themselves. He didn't want to miss the band's first performance. That way he could get used to the sound, to the crowd, he could mentally prepare himself. Oh, and support Bdubs of course.

As soon as the Hermits noticed the four on the stage, cheers erupted from them. Etho stepped out from behind the table while Cub paused the playlist. It only took a moment

for Xisuma to start their first song. Impulse twirled his drumsticks, an impressive show of talent, before joining him.

Even if he didn't know the song being played, they were *so good*. The four of them worked in perfect harmony. They'd practised a lot, of course they had, and Etho could clearly remember the times the other three had bugged him to practise with them as well.

His worries eased a little when he saw his friends having fun. After the first song, most turned back to dancing, their conversations or simply enjoying themselves. It was relieving to see not all the attention was on the band the entire time.

He didn't manage to stay on the sidelines for long. Before he knew it, he'd caught Cleo and Jevin's attention. The two worked their way through the crowd to find him at the edge. They didn't even need to utter a word for Etho to know their purpose.

“Etho! You're not planning on hiding in this corner all night, are you?” Jevin crossed his arms. “We can't have you standing around like a loser!”

He raised his hands in defence. “Hey, I'm perfectly fine standing here like a loser! I'm supposed to stand like a loser by the drinks and help you guys when you need it. I just wanted to watch them play for a bit.”

Cleo playfully punched him in the shoulder. His wince went ignored. “Not happening.” She grabbed him by the arm to pull him towards the dancefloor. “You are *not* standing around like a loser. You're going to dance, whether you like it or not!”

Neither gave him the chance to even protest. He'd lost sight of them before he could get a word out. Then, Xisuma started to play the familiar tune of The Weight Of Love, and he couldn't find it in himself to be annoyed with his friends.

The Hermits were friendly, welcoming. The dance floor was a place where they could all enjoy themselves and Etho joined them with a smile. The beat, the instruments and the wonderful voice of Bdubs himself easily guided his body to dance along with the rest. Everyone eagerly sang along with the chorus, making the song even more perfect.

The loudness of the music waved away his anxiety. His heart still raced in his chest, but the drums and the bass were much stronger. He barely got the chance to think about performing, not when Gem took his hands and pulled him into a dance.

They adapted to each other easily — memories of wooden swords and MCC practice flashed by — as they danced with matching laughs. “Thank you for setting this up!” she shouted over the music.

As if they'd done this a million times, Etho twirled her around and she followed his lead. “No need to thank me!” They'd all agreed a party would do them good. He only helped set up a few things. Besides, the others had done much more to make the party a reality. “I did the least.”

Gem scoffed. “I don't want to hear it!” she scolded him, but she smiled anyway.

A pause in the music. He looked up to see the band change up their settings. Xisuma worked his magic on his guitar. Cub helped set up from the back of the room.

When they continued playing, the instruments played much different sounds than before. The telltale music of a tango filled the room. A few giggles were sent Tango's way. The energy in the room went up immediately.

"Stalker's Tango?" Gem laughed. "How much do you wanna bet Bdubs will jump down and dance with him?" She nodded towards them.

As if on cue, Bdubs held his hand out for Tango to take. The latter didn't hesitate, eagerly joining the band on the stage. And *of course* he knew how to tango. He danced right along with the other as if he'd been in on the plan all along.

Etho could only clap at the complicated dance, cheering them on. It didn't take long for him to be swept away by someone else. It came less as a surprise this time, and Beef's bright grin was a welcome sight. All he could do was laugh and be led by the music and his friends.

At some point, after many songs and a couple changes in music style, Cub took over. From where he'd hooked his communicator up to the speakers, he switched to a playlist full of party songs.

Etho looked up just in time to see Bdubs drop from the stage. Excusing himself from Beef, he weaved through the Hermits to meet his friend. He knew neither of them would hear if he tried to talk over the music, so he grabbed his hand and dragged him to the drinks table. Besides, they could both use one.

"You were amazing!" He wasted no time pouring them both cups of water. He handed one to Bdubs. "How was it?"

The other gulped it down in a heartbeat. He could barely blink before the other cup was taken from his hand as well. This time, he savoured it. "It was great! I can't wait to get back on stage!" He flashed a brilliant smile, crumpling the empty cup. "It's so fun, you have no idea! I know you'd never get on that stage but I tell you, it's amazing."

But he *would*, in a minute or two. Biting his tongue to stop himself from spoiling the surprise, he just patted Bdubs on the back. "Everyone loved it. Especially Tango, I don't think he's stopped laughing since you started playing that song."

It was a reminder for himself. The Hermits were going to love him. He'd practised, he knew the songs by heart and he's had three of his best friends to hype him up the last weeks. They'd left no space for him to feel bad about his ability to sing, crushing all negative feelings the moment he voiced them. He was going to do *great*.

Bdubs glanced back to the stage. "I'm glad! I'll get back on in a second, I just have to wait for the others I guess."

He hummed, hiding a smile behind a cup. Xisuma had already noticed him standing by the drinks and signed that they'd get back on the stage in five. Etho had to stop himself from tapping his fingers nervously.

He couldn't wait to see the look on everyone's faces, Bdubs' most of all.

Pulling the mask from his face, he stuffed it in his pocket. Luckily, it only really got him

an odd look. Bdubs was too busy talking about one of the songs to worry about it. He had no idea which song or why he was so enthusiastic about it, the nerves in his stomach so strong he couldn't pay attention to the words.

The moment came much too soon. He watched Doc hop back onto the stage. Impulse broke off from his conversation as well. He shot Etho the smallest smile and thumbs up before he jumped onto the stage.

He took a deep breath in to steel himself. "Hey, Dubs? I'll be right back," he said, trying to smile but probably looking beyond nervous. Instead of waiting for a reply, he walked up to the side of the stage.

"Okay! Wait- where are you going?" Bdubs called out after him.

Etho replied with only a grin. At the edge of the stage, turning away from his friend, he looked over the crowd. There were ... *so many* faces. But they were all friends, he reminded himself. Nothing but friends in front of him.

Deep breath in, deep breath out.

Impulse, Doc and Xisuma were already waiting for him on the stage. They were all brimming with excitement, and Etho found himself matching that energy soon enough. He shot X a nervous smile as he walked past. The mic waited for him at the centre of the stage, right in front of everyone.

He caught Bdubs staring at him from the back of the throne room. His mouth hung open, eyes wide in shock.

In mere seconds, he was noticed by others. He hadn't even fixed the mic to the perfect height before Cleo saw him and called out his name. It was enough to make everyone turn to the stage again. He sheepishly waved back.

The instant he took the mic in hands and Impulse hit the first drum, his anxiety spiked. A moment later, it all dissipated. All his worries faded away with the bass from Doc's guitar.

When he began to sing — perfectly, like he'd practised all those times — he fully relaxed. The words came naturally. His foot tapped along with the beat. Guitar filled his ears, the drums and bass moved his body. Lights flashed. The grin on his face came easily.

It was like he couldn't tire. The music guided him through the evening. He swung, laughed, stood back to back with X. The night couldn't get any better. Even when they paused to catch their breaths, Etho couldn't wait to get back at it. The night was far from over, and the drink graciously gifted by Bdubs couldn't be finished fast enough.

Most important of all, he'd completely forgotten what he was even worried about the entire time.









The Moon Will Set

"Oh, oh! Oh— oh gosh that was a shracker. Oh gosh. Oh, I just— I just pooped myself. Oh my gosh. I'm just coming off Triple-Life-Last-Life-Double-Life-Limited-Life, whatever the series was called! Where if you hear that sound that means— something's gonna blow up and you're outta the series! But no, this is Hermitcraft, and I think this is a friendly shracker. Yeah, it's a friendly shracker, everyone's nice around here and not trying to kill you, and I'm not trying to scam them, this— this is Hermitcraft. Anyway..."

— Scar, Hermitcraft S9 EP36

Half an instant after he hits the ground at the bottom of a cliff in the Red Desert, Grian throws himself into Scar's open arms.

The hermits and their friends laugh and cheer and flock to the pair of them, like seagulls to a chip that's been dropped on the concrete, as Scar pulls Grian into a warm embrace. There's a rush of adrenaline still thrumming in his veins, lightheaded as he's enveloped by excited fervour, bodies, voices. Delighted cheers, treasured friends chanting his name (here, safe, *alive*), raised cups of cactus juice.

Grian is shaking. He's not completely sure why. It could be any mixture of relief and euphoria, lingering fear and adrenaline and grief. Someone is playing *Otherside* on a music disc. His back is clapped and his hair is ruffled by half a dozen people, surrounded by breathless smiles and congratulations on his victory. Grian's head spins with it, leaning on Scar for support, a slight tremble in his hands. (Which— they should be bloodied, shouldn't they? No. No, because he jumped off a cliff and— respawned. Of course.) His thoughts are stopped in their tracks for a moment as he looks up at Scar and notices a soft pink blush dusting his cheeks, no longer sickly and grey. His moss green eyes.

It's when Jimmy comes over to hug him, tearing Grian's attention away from Scar and finally meeting his eye (and Grian's heart *melts*, Timmy's been gone the longest, it's good to see his face again), that he notices something isn't quite right. He hesitates, taking half a step back, yellow wings spread wide to gently fend off the crowd of people surrounding the desert duo. "Alright, hang on, hang on! Let's give Grian a bit of space, let the man breathe a minute!"

(And Jimmy might be on to something about him needing space, but Grian holds on to tight to Scar's hand, keeping him close. Scar is the exception. Of course he is.)

Grian lets out a breath he didn't quite realise he was holding, offering Tim a small smile as thanks. He takes a deep breath—in, out—suddenly feeling very small under the gaze of his friends. He doesn't want them to worry about him. It's nice to be worried about

after weeks of suspicion and animosity and— he's won, he should be *happy*— he is happy—but there's a ringing in his ears and he doesn't know what to do with any of it.

Scar squeezes his shoulder and murmurs in his ear, a reassuringly solid presence: "You okay?"

(Distantly, someone turns *Otherside* off.)

He nods, despite himself. Disoriented, but—he knows what answer he wants to give even if he's still working up to it being the truth. "Yeah, just—" he stammers, letting out a long, slow exhale. He clears his throat. "Just a bit jumpy."

Jimmy's wings twitch at the lie—of course he can tell—but he says nothing. Joel shoots him a curious look. He's caught on too.

Grian ignores them, taking another deep breath, avoiding the watchful eyes of his friends. "It's—it's really good to see you all again."

His voice is soft. Timid. Sincere.

He closes his eyes, and there's—

Sand. Cactus. Falling.

And he releases a long, slow breath, before opening his eyes. And in front of him there's Jimmy, Martyn, Cleo, *Impulse*—

Friends and warmth and love.

He unfurls his wings and holds them wide open, offering a small, shy smile. And one by one, he brings each of his friends within their fold.

To Grian's own surprise, it's not his mansion that he's happiest to see when he makes it back to Hermitcraft, but the barge.

He sits on the soft white bed in the centre of the main atrium, watching quietly as evening light filters through the glass roof and walls, wooden support beams casting long shadows on the floor. The barge is probably one of his favourite builds he's done in a long time. Despite the pressure and grinding that comes with keeping it stocked, it gives him a sense of peace like no other build he's ever done, somewhere between a greenhouse and a cathedral, with signs of friends coming and going in his absence. The barge is filled with traces of warmth and hermits, where the mansion can admittedly get a bit cold and lonely.

He takes a deep breath, exhaling slowly as watches flames flicker in one of the lanterns hanging from the ceiling, soaking in the warm amber light, the gentle crackle of fire. He

closes his eyes, enjoying the peace.

And jumps *at least a foot in the air* when he hears a loud crash, the crunch of bones snapping and a strangled yelp, as a blur of a person dies right in front of him.

He screams, high-pitched and genuine, freezing on the spot as he recoils back. He snatches up his sword immediately, heart rate elevated, eyes darting to his communicator.

> *GoodTimeWithScar hit the ground too hard.*

Grian stares at the message in disbelief, feeling his blood run cold as a familiar dread carves a chasm through his stomach. A hair-trigger response to a Scar death message in the wake of Third Life.

Then he starts to *giggle*.

"Scar!" he shrieks into empty air, face splitting wide in disbelief. He cannot *believe* this man, he went a month at *least* on his red life and yet the minute he gets his hands on an elytra he's gone again just like that?! He wheezes, clutching his stomach as his friend's items float in the air around him, enchantments shimmering, scattered across the floor of the barge. He wipes a tear from his eye and reaches for his communicator, to see Scar's already sent a message.

> *bUT I TWIRLED SO GRACEFULLY*

And Grian loses it *again*, tipping his head back and falling onto the bed, cackling like a madman. Oh, it feels *good* to watch Scar die and not have it be the end of the world. There's a rabbit-quick step to his heartbeat that he can't quite shake, but his mind is at ease, if a little giddy with glee. He'll collect Scar's items and put them in a chest to keep them safe, just. Give him a minute.

His communicator buzzes a few more times as a few other hermits check in with Scar, who seems absolutely fine other than not having another pair of wings on him. Grian sighs fondly as he picks the items up one by one and deposits them in a spare shulker, sitting on top of the box to close it as he types out a reply.

> *that's peculiar*

> *a bunch of valuable items seem to have suddenly appeared on the floor of the barge*

> *including an elytra*

> *any bidders?*

> *GRIAN NO DON'T YOU DARE*

Grian bursts into another peal of laughter, silly with it. He would never, he would *never*, and Scar knows that, but it's extremely fun to string him along.

He keeps himself busy with the general upkeep of the barge as the sun slowly sinks below the horizon, enjoying the occasional firing of rockets as other hermits pass

through the shopping district. He sketches out plans for the rollercoaster minigame he hopes to build before the season is up. Mumbo (*Mumbo!* He's back on the same world as Mumbo!) sends him a photo of a chicken that's found its way onto the very top of his base captioned, '*friend of yours?*'. Grian declares he's never had anything to do with chickens. Mumbo confidently shoots back that that is definitely a photo of a parrot.

He smiles happily down at his communicator as he snuffs out the last lantern hanging from the atrium roof for the night, standing in the middle of the dim. He bids Mumbo a good night, hesitating for a moment as he thinks to check in on Scar. Is that— should he? Or is it just force of habit at this point? Is it silly of him to worry about Scar now?

He shakes his head as if to clear it. He should definitely make sure Scar isn't on his way back to pick up his items before going to sleep.

> *hey dude I'm going to sleep soon unless ur coming back for your gear tonight*

It doesn't take long for him to get a reply.

> *I am being held hostage.*

> *Jellie has been sitting on my legs for the past thirty minutes*

Grian laughs softly, letting out an adoring coo, even if it's for his ears alone.

> *awwww she missed you huh?*

Scar is quick to respond.

> *She was sulking ALL DAY*

> *I think she was mad at me for leaving her for so long.*

> *But I gave her all of her favourite treats and now she has no choice but to forgive me :)*

Grian chuckles quietly, typing out a reply.

> *awwwwwww*

> *im sleeping in the barge but dont worry about waking me if you wanted to come by early in the morning*

> *Oh you're not sleeping in the mansion?*

> *the barge is much more cozy honestly*

> *I think I would feel lonely in all that empty space at the moment*

> *I get it.*

> *I've moved back into Larry, actually.*

There's a slight pause in Scar's typing, an extra few breaths. And then:

> *Can we make breakfast together tomorrow?*

Grian's heart warms as he reads it, sitting down on the bed again with a contented

flutter of his wings. There's a small ache in his chest that he's a little less scared to acknowledge than he would have been otherwise, if Scar is missing having him around too.

> *definitely*

> *gnight scar <3*

> *Goodnight G :)*

He shuts off his communicator with a fond smile, placing it carefully on the floor a few feet away from the bed, burrowing deeper into the blankets. He can already feel the gentle tug of sleep pulling at his heels, a heaviness settling into his bones. Before he allows himself to slip away completely, he pulls himself up onto his forearms and reaches for the lantern at his bedside, holding it close to his face. Feeling the warmth of the fire inside on his cheeks.

And he stares into the light, overcome with a strange wave of strength and possessiveness as he feels for a moment that it's *his*. Here in *his* home, safe and warm.

And the walls aren't burning, only the oil.

And the cigarette box is empty of ash.

And the love inside has a place to rest.

And he blows the lantern out, plunging the barge into darkness.



Hello lovely Hermitzine reader, Zip Zap here! I'm also a musician, and the track matched with this piece was written for this zine as a companion to my fic! I'm hoping the music captures some of the same themes as the fic, using The Crane Wives / folk textures as inspiration but subverting some of the emotions associated with their songs, putting those instruments in a lofi hip-hop context to denote the comfort and safety of returning to Hermitcraft rather than the emotional turmoil of the Life Series. Thank you for listening!











Interdimensional radios are hard to set up. They're not impossible to get, but it's rare for a server the size of Hermitcraft to have one at all.

Hermitcraft's radio is a small green box, a bit damaged. The paint is almost completely gone around the edges, from being dragged around so many worlds for so many years. No one can quite remember who brought it the first time around. The radio switches hands so often and on a schedule so convoluted, there is no telling which Hermit currently has the luxury of blasting some tunes while building, unless you are currently near their base and still have working hearing.

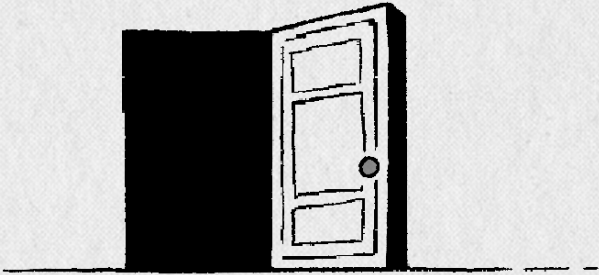
It's always easy to locate Doc when it's his turn to hold on to it. He plays it loud enough to drown out the continuous TNT explosions for hours at the time, and oscillates between two stations – HiveLive, devoted solely to redstone talk, and Alternative Astral 108.36 hell-bent on rapturing their listeners' eardrums.

Ren listens to whatever station one of the many Dog family members is currently performing on. Etho likes instrumental stuff. Bdubs is partial to GroovetacularFM which, as the name would suggest, is pretty groovy.

When Hermits gather together, the radio is always there. Whether it be for playing games or just hanging out, grinding or building together, the beat-up green metal box is blasting some interdimensional tunes.

It's no surprise that in the belly of the Deep Frost Citadel, there is now a radio in the waiting room, happy to provide some respite in a place that wants to eat you alive. The dungeon glares at the happy little metal box. The radio remains blissfully unaware, as most radios do.





Live from Nashville Tennessee

It's Joe and Quinn Hills
Here to sing you a song, live
You've been sing-song-ditched



Thank you for reading!

Firstly, we would like to thank each and every participant for the hard work and care they've put into this collection; for the ideas, personality and sheer skill they've poured into this zine. This is the culmination of all of their efforts, and we cannot thank them enough for the time they've spent with us.

Additionally, we thank every single Hermit — without your wonderful creative productions, your incredible videos, builds, storylines and friendships, this zine wouldn't exist. Thank you for being an inspiration to so many, including every one of us.

Lastly, thank you all for reading this zine. This project has been a work of love and appreciation, and we're grateful to be able to share it with you.

— The Hermitzine Mod Team



Meet the Mods



A10

Participant
communication

☐ boxbugg

t boxbug



Marzo

Editing

t martuzzio



Noctude

Community
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Ray/Cloud

Social media

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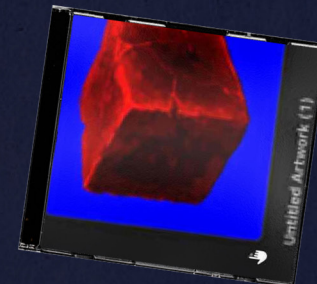


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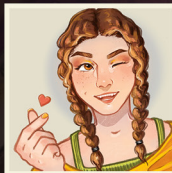
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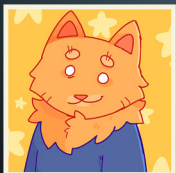
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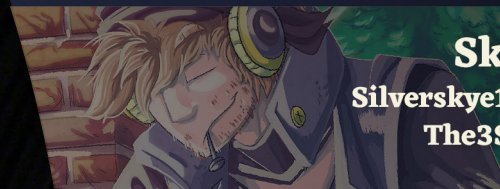
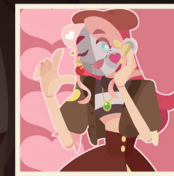


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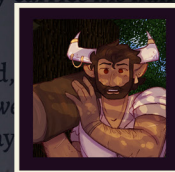


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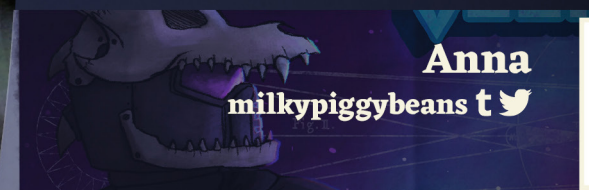


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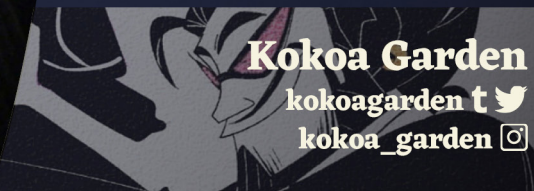
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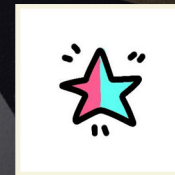
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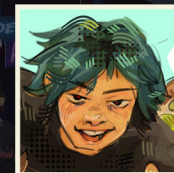
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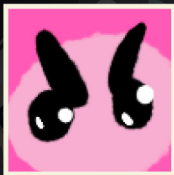


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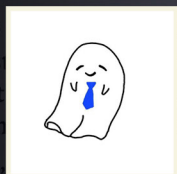
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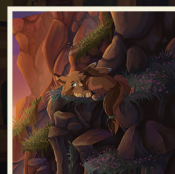
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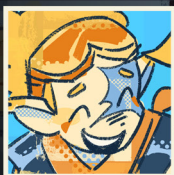
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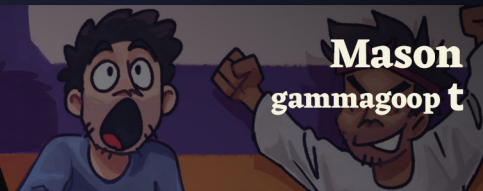
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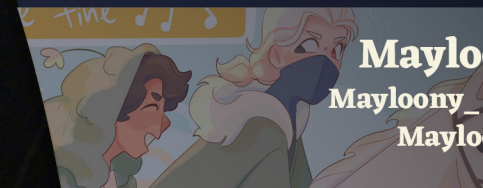
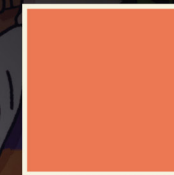


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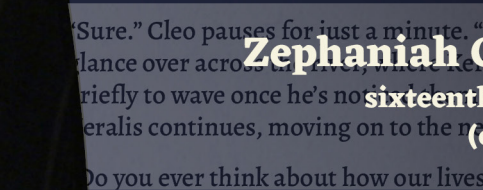


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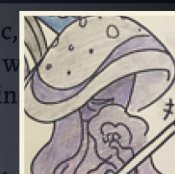
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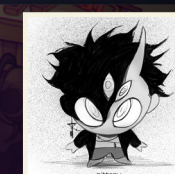
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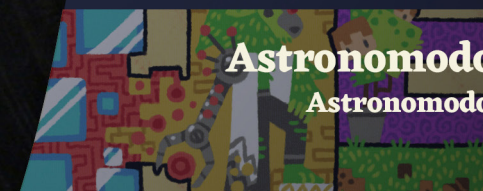
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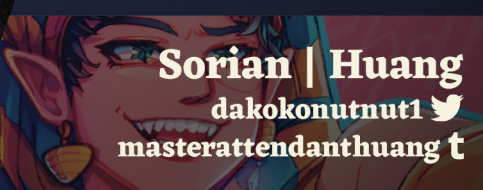
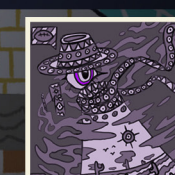
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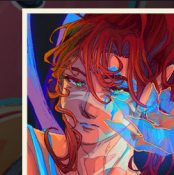
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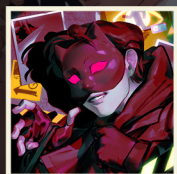
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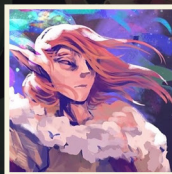
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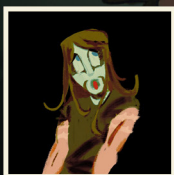
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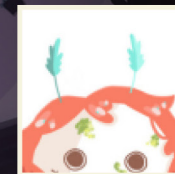
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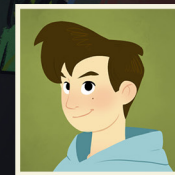
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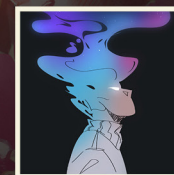
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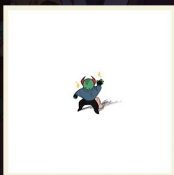
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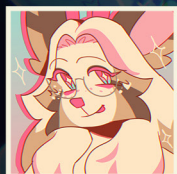
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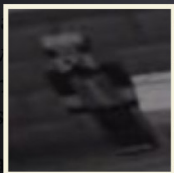
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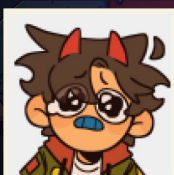
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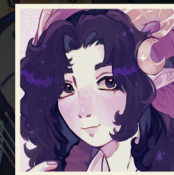


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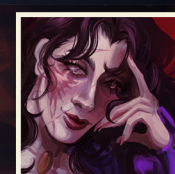
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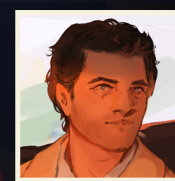
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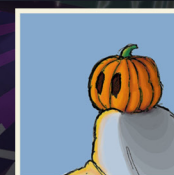
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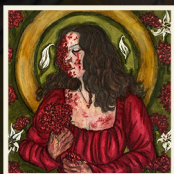
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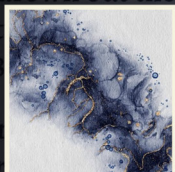
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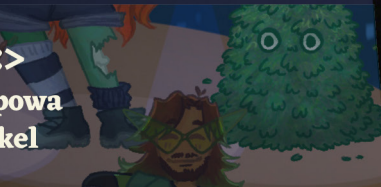
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Jay

It's Joe and Quinn Hills
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✂ Jos has too many hobbies
You've been sing-song-ditched



The image is a dense, repeating pattern of colorful rectangular blocks, each containing text. The blocks are arranged in a grid-like fashion, with each block containing a different combination of text and color. The text is often repeated or slightly distorted, creating a sense of a corrupted or glitched image. The colors are vibrant and varied, including shades of blue, red, yellow, green, and purple. The overall effect is a complex, abstract visual texture. The text within the blocks includes words like "ADVISORY", "MINECRAFT", "HERMITCRAFT", "HERMITZINE", "NOT SPAWN PROOF", "HOTGUY SIGHTINGS", "ABSOLUTE BANGERS", "SPOON-LEVEL DERPS", "SORTIFICATION FAIL", "LIVE DRAGON", "NOT SCAR SAFE", and "HERMITGANG HERMITGANG". The blocks are of various sizes and are scattered across the entire image, creating a chaotic and visually busy composition.



**THANK YOU
FOR READING!**